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ELEVATING LATINA VOICES OF LEADERSHIP:

Latina Student Leaders' Beliefs, Approaches, and Influences to Leadership

Abstract

There is a recent call for and emergence of leadership research that purposefully centers students' social identities and lived experiences in order to gain more nuanced understandings of college student leadership development and elevate marginalized voices in the leadership narrative. In this qualitative study, the researchers focused on the leadership approaches of Latina college student leaders at Hispanic Serving Institutions and the influences that shape their approaches to leadership. The findings reveal participants' unique forms of capital as well as sources of on-campus support that shape and influence their leadership beliefs and styles, including a focus on community, a commitment to making a positive impact, and non-hierarchical approaches to leadership.

Introduction

The demographic characteristics of the undergraduate student population in the United States continue to diversify. With this evolution, it is imperative that research on college impact become more nuanced in design, anticipating conditional effects of college rather than simply general effects (Pascarella, 2006). Scholars are encouraged to examine the richness of student background, identity, and diversity in their research and look deeper than the broad and general effects of higher education. One area in which this deeper examination is warranted is college student leadership development.

Considering Identity in College Student Leadership Development

Leadership development is a primary outcome of higher education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Guthrie &

Chunoo, 2018), and research on student leadership must become more nuanced. Unfortunately, leadership education literature and practice have

> rarely challenged the notion of disadvantage or the ways that power and privilege perpetuate disadvantage for some groups of people . . . only to reinforce dominant perspectives of leadership and fails to initiate an acceptance of the necessity of diverse people, knowledge, and ideas, thus stagnating social change. (Bertrand Jones, Guthrie, & Osteen, 2016, p. 10).

Although there has been increased focus on student leadership development both in research and practice, little research has considered students' gender and racial identities. Many leadership scholars today seek to center students' identities and critically examine and challenge limited, dominant perspectives of leadership through their research and scholarship

(Bertrand Jones et al., 2016; Dugan, 2017; Guthrie & Chunoo, 2018; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2017). To advance leadership education outcomes for all students, "culturally relevant and critical leadership education must provide experiences for students to understand and grow as leaders embodying various identities . . . not leaders despite their identities" (Suarez, 2015, p. 42).

A growing but limited literature and research base focuses on the leadership development of Latinx students (Guardia & Salinas, 2018; Lozano, 2015a; Torres, 2018). The term Latinx is used as a non-gender binary term to encompass individuals of Latin American descent living in the United States (Garcia-Navarro, 2015). The leadership outcomes of Latinx populations have been examined both qualitatively and quantitatively in studies that broadly examined differences in leadership outcomes and experiences of college students by race (Arminio et al., 2000; Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008; Haber, 2012). Recent limited research focuses specifically on the leadership experiences of Latinx populations, shedding light onto the nuanced ways Latinx students view leadership, develop as leaders, and engage in leadership (Garcia, Huerta, Ramirez, & Patrón, 2017; Lozano, 2015b; Onorato & Musoba, 2015).

The limited scholarly work that focuses specifically on Latinx student leadership suggests students approach leadership with a communal focus and emphasis on inclusion and relationships (Arminio et al., 2000; Bordas, 2016; Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Ostick & Wall, 2011). Research suggests Latinx students view leadership with an outward focus on others and on the group, emphasizing community, collaboration, and empowerment (Lozano, 2015b). Further, when considering the role of leader, often Latinx students deemphasize leadership positions and resist the term leader; instead they tend to emphasize their membership and involvement in the group and associate being a leader with being a role model and taking action (Arminio et al., 2000; Lozano,

2015b). Researchers who have examined Latinx involvement and leadership, including involvement in culturally-based sororities and fraternities, found that co-curricular involvement also contributes to members' ethnic identity development, greater connection with the larger Latinx community and issues facing the community, and motivations to be a change agent (Guardia, 2015; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Lozano, 2015b; Nuñez, 2004).

In addition to the growing scholarly literature base on Latinx students, there has been an increase in recent research on gender and leadership as well as studies acknowledging and examining students' interlocking identities related to their leadership development and outcomes. This scholarship suggests some differences in college students' leadership behaviors, perceptions, self-efficacy, and outcomes based on gender (Dugan et al., 2008; Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2018; Shim, 2013). Research focusing specifically on college women suggests college women often enact relational and democratic approaches to leadership characterized by collaboration, building relationships, empowering others, and seeking to enhance the organization (Haber, 2011; Haber-Curran, 2013; Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2017; Romano, 1996). Also, compared to college men, college women tend to demonstrate lower levels of self-efficacy for leadership (Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2017); further, college women often undersell themselves and their experiences and skills related to leadership (Haber-Curran, 2013; Princeton University, 2011).

Seeking to address the dearth of research on Latina college student leadership, Oranato and Musoba (2015) conducted a qualitative case study examining Latina student leaders at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), specifically examining the students' leadership identity development. Similar to previous research on students of color, many of the women in the study who were classified as emerging leaders resisted the title of leader, associating it negatively

with power and top-down approaches to leadership (Oranato & Musoba, 2015). Other participants with more experience, labeled by the researchers as intermediate and experienced leaders, more readily owned the title of leader and positional roles but did so in a way that embraced relational approaches to leadership and focused on empowering, rather than controlling, others. Other key themes that emerged from this study were: (a) the important role that individuals who encouraged participants played in their leadership development; (b) the varied motivations for participants' engagement in leadership, emphasized by a desire to be part of something meaningful and bigger than themselves; and (c) participants' intentional desire to grow and develop personally through their experiences. An additional theme was the salience of participants' interlocking gender and ethnic identities; strong gender role expectations impacted their leadership identity development, and at times these expectations were conflicting (e.g., be a "good Hispanic woman" and "rely upon yourself, not a man"; Oranoto & Musoba, p. 25).

Further attention has been drawn to the importance of focusing on Latina college students' leadership development through Torres' (2018) call for leadership educators to understand and consider the unique experiences of Latinas when designing leadership development opportunities. Without specific focus on Latinas' experiences and identities, "leadership educators underserve Latina students by pushing them to pick an identity and not being aware how this might invalidate a Latina student and their ability to lead" (Torres, 2018, p. 138).

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

As the diversification of the United States college student population continues to increase, the literature on student leadership education remains an "under-examined, but critically important aspect of the college experience for Latina/o students" (Lozano, 2015b, p. 3). Lozano (2017) asserts that although on

many campuses the Latinx population is the largest racial/ethnic minor group on campus, "the black/white paradigm stubbornly persists" (p. 28) in terms of discussions around diversity and race. In recognizing the salience of students' interlocking identities, there is a need to further examine the leadership experiences of Latina students more specifically. Although recent research provides valuable insight into the leadership identity development of Latinas, additional research further examining the leadership experiences, approaches, and influences of Latina students is warranted in order to better serve and support Latinas in their leadership development.

The purpose of this study was to examine the unique leadership approaches of Latina college student leaders at HSIs and the influences that shape their approaches to leadership. We sought to examine participants' stories and identify the forms of capital that Latina college students bring to their experiences as student leaders. Stories collected from people with marginalized and oppressed identities are a powerful, valid source of information (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2005) and are, in many cases, missing from the discussion on student leadership. As Bertrand Jones et al. (2016) assert, "the times call for a more complicated, nuanced discussion about marginalized populations, social change, and leadership on college campus" (p. 10), and this study contributes to that complicated, nuanced discussion by centering the stories and experiences of Latina student leaders.

Theoretical Framework

Our study relies on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) model. Yosso's (2005) framework, grounded in critical race theory, identifies six forms of capital (aspirational, familial, social, navigational, linguistic, and resistant) and gives language to describe the "knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (p. 175). This asset-based framework has emerged as a useful lens for understanding the

educational experiences of marginalized student populations in a variety of ways, including high school students' acquisition of college knowledge (Holland, 2014), academic determination (Pérez, 2017), undergraduate experiences (Luna & Martinez, 2013), experiences at HSIs (Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2015), and graduate education experiences (Espino, 2017). Still, college student leadership development has not been explored using CCW as a lens. The CCW model affirms the methods of this study that acknowledge Latina college student leaders as the experts on their own experiences. Further, this framework shifts college student leadership research from being a culturally-neutral approach to one that centers students' cultural identities.

Methods

The purpose of the study was to examine the unique leadership approaches of Latina college student leaders and the influences that shape their approaches to leadership. The two research questions guiding the study were:

> RQ1: How do Latina student leaders describe their approach to leadership?

> RQ2: What are the key influences that shape Latina student leaders' leadership approaches?

We used a phenomenological research design to gain an understanding of the leadership experiences of Latina students who held leadership positions in campus organizations. A phenomenological approach involves gaining "a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9), allowing researchers to capture the essence of a particular lived experience and illustrate individuals' first-person perspectives of their experiences (Klenke, 2008), in this case Latina student leaders' experiences of holding a leadership position. The phenomenological approach elevates and centers participants' voices, experiences, and meaning making, acknowledging that participants

are the experts on their own experiences and that their stories are valid and powerful sources of information (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2005). Elevating and centering students' voices and stories responds to the call in leadership education research to challenge dominant perspectives on and approaches to leadership characterized by power and privilege by expanding the discussion of marginalized populations and leadership in higher education (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016; Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2018).

Research Sites and Participants. Human subjects approval was granted for the study from the internal review boards for each of the six research sites, and the primary investigator also received an internal research grant to assist in conducting the study. Purposive sampling procedures were used to recruit participants for the study. Participants were recruited at six HSIs across three states in different regions of the U.S. (Southwest, South, and Southeast). The researchers selected HSIs due to the likelihood that there would be more Latinas in leadership positions at these institutions. The geographic diversity of the institutions chosen for the study allowed for capturing cultural and ethnic diversity within the sample. The institutions included one community college, one private religiously-affiliated university, and four large public institutions. Diversity was also sought in type of organizations in which participants were actively involved and held leadership roles.

The principle investigator for the study worked with administrators on each campus to identify potential participants who received an email invitation to participate in the study. Interested students completed a brief online form to gather information about their leadership and involvement experiences.

Sixteen participants were included in the study. Ten participants were seniors, three were juniors, and three were sophomores. Participants' self-disclosed ethnic identities include: Latina, Hispanic, Mexican, Venezuelan, Cuban, Brazilian American, and Puerto Rican. Approximately two-thirds of participants were first-generation college students. One participant had

a disclosed disability (visual impairment). Participants' student organization involvement varied greatly and included student government, Greek letter organizations, cultural organizations (e.g., MEChA, Latinas Unidas), new student orientation leaders, athletic teams, service organizations, and student life/activities.

Data Collection and Analysis. Data were collected through one-on-one face-to-face semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) conducted by the principle investigator and her graduate assistant. The interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes. Questions within the semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 2002) ranged from participants' experiences in positional leadership roles; beliefs about what it means to be a leader; leadership strategies and approaches; relationships with group members; messages they have received about leadership; connections between their social identities and leadership; and individuals and other factors that influenced their leadership approaches. Some questions from the semi-structured interview guide were adapted from Haber's (2011) study on college women leaders.

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and checked for accuracy. In analyzing data through a phenomenological approach "themes may be understood as the structures of experience. So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79). We looked to Colaizzi's (1978) guidelines for phenomenological data analysis to address issues of trustworthiness. First, we examined the interview transcripts in full to glean an initial sense of participants and their experiences. Next, we selected key statements from the interviews, arranged the statements into themes, and referred "these clusters of themes back to the original protocols in order to validate them" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). From there, we developed the description of the phenomena and finalized the themes (Beck, 1994). Throughout this process we analyzed the data individually and collectively, discussing the data and themes in order to finalize them. Validity and reliability of the analysis were addressed through continuously comparing the data back to the data sources (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Additionally, the initial themes were examined and analyzed by a colleague independent from the research to help address reliability (Klenke, 2008).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study. The purpose of this study was to examine the unique leadership approaches of Latina college student leaders and the influences that shape their approaches to leadership. We sought out the self-reported and self-expressed experiences of participants in their leadership roles; the study did not include observation of participants' experiences in action, examination over time, or examination through the perspectives of peers with whom the participants worked. Thus, the findings from the study are limited and only include participants' self-reported perspectives and experiences.

Our positionality as researchers serves as a potential barrier to the study. The principle investigator (and first author) identifies as a woman and is not a member of the Latinx community. The second author identifies as a man and is also not a member of the Latinx community. The initial interview protocol was used in pilot interviews with Latina graduate student leaders, and feedback was sought from the pilot interview participants about the questions. We also engaged in open, shared critical reflexivity as a part of our data collection and analysis process, which helped us acknowledge and make meaning of our positionality to this study (Hesse-Biber, 2005).

The selected population of students who were positional leaders for this study serves as a delimitation of the study. Students who do not hold formal leadership positions can also exhibit and experience leadership, and these perspectives were not included in this study. Additionally, the chosen research sites of HSIs serve as a second delimitation of the study; the perspectives of Latina student leaders who do not attend HSIs were not included in this research. Despite the limitations and delimitations of the study, this study fills a gap in the research,

providing important insight into the experiences of Latina student leaders.

Findings

Two research questions guided this study: (a) How do Latina student leaders describe their approach to leadership?, and (b) What are the key influences that shape Latina student leaders' leadership approaches? We explored students' perceptions of what it means to be a leader and how they describe their personal leadership style. Emerging themes included: (a) leadership is focused on community and positive impact, and (b) embracing relational and non-hierarchical approaches to leadership. In exploring influences on participants' approaches to leadership, two key themes emerged: (a) family and culture, and (b) on-campus relationships.

Leadership Approaches. To examine participants' approach to leadership, we asked what it means to them to be a leader and the ways in which they lead in their organizations. The two emergent themes were: (a) focus on community and positive impact, and (b) non-hierarchical and relational approaches to leading. Each theme is discussed further below.

> Focus on community and positive impact. As participants reflected on their leadership experiences and their roles as leaders there was a clear emphasis on the importance of community. The students described how, within their respective student organizations, it was important to maintain and invest their focus and energy on the members of their organizations and the organization as a whole. They felt responsibility to build a sense of support and community within the group. Trisha explained that being a leader is not about the leader herself; instead, it is "about the people you are leading." When asked what it meant to her to be a student leader, Jennifer responded, "I don't really consider myself a student leader, I feel like I just did my part to help

an organization." She continued by saying, "For me what I get most out of it is the volunteering, the people, the community, you know, the community of being part of an organization." Vi also emphasized leadership as a communal concept, stating "It means that you have people alongside of you; you guys are building towards a goal, building towards an event, building to fulfill your actual mission within your organization." It was clear across these responses and others that leadership was not about their position or title as leaders in their organizations; rather, leadership was about playing a role in a group and organization to help move that organization, its members, and its purpose forward.

Inherent within the focus on community was participants' sense of purpose around making a positive impact. This was prevalent in participants' desire to help develop and improve their group members, their organizations, the larger campus community, and the Latinx community. Nearly all participants discussed the importance of developing and helping other students who were in their organizations or on their campuses. Crystal served as president of a cultural organization for Latinas at her university; she discussed a feeling of responsibility in helping the members of her organization in their journeys through higher education, particularly the newer and younger members. She explained, "I want to make sure that we still have that safe space for girls to come and talk every week and make sure that everyone is still doing okay. . . . I want to guide these people to the right path and choices and help them make those choices."

Valerie's aim to make a positive impact expanded to the larger campus

community through her position in student government. She stated, "to empower others is my ultimate goal and helping . . . students, overall, have the best experience they can." Her sense of making a positive impact spanned to the whole community, even students she may not personally know. Jane also had a focus on the larger campus community as she thought about her impact, stating, "one person can make that difference and I think I aim to do that, to leave my impact and to leave this school better than I found it."

Participants also expressed a desire to empower and motivate group members in their leadership journeys. Natalie expressed similar goals as a leader and viewed her role as "an opportunity to help others realize their potential." Similarly, Sandy described the importance of "bring[ing] out the inner-leader in people" as a critical component of being a leader, which she felt made a positive impact on her group members, helped them realize their passions, and gave them motivation to pursue those passions. Some participants also expressed that part of empowering others involved motivating them to be committed to making a positive impact in their organizations, on campus, and in the community. Jennifer discussed the impact she hoped to have on the members of her organization, "I want them to consider their group, their community . . . how the other members are going to benefit. Everything factors in into how you are going to come out a better person and how you are going to help the organizations that you once started off in."

Some participants, particularly those who held leadership roles in culturally-based organizations, sought to make a positive impact within the Latinx community. Julie discussed what it meant to her to be a leader and said, "I am helping my culture also by helping the members in my organization [recognize] how important it is to be a leader and what can you do and . . . what can we do for our community." Within her role in MEChA, Mary sought to instill a culture of giving back to the larger Latinx community within her organization. She discussed how important it was for her to mentor members in her organization because she knew she played a role in empowering the larger Latinx community on campus and beyond.

Relational and non-hierarchical approaches to leadership. A dominant theme across all participants was engaging in relational and non-hierarchical approaches to leadership. It was important to participants that the work of a student leader was not done in isolation; rather, collaboration was key to moving organizations forward. Many participants challenged traditional top-down leadership approaches and emphasized working and leading together with others. Jennifer made clear that when it comes to leading her organization, she believes "we are all the same people . . . we are equal; the group comes first." Naomi and Natalie echoed this, saying, "I'm not a hierarchical leader at all" and, "I don't want to people to think that I'm above them." As they reflected on how they help move their organizations forward, participants discussed the importance of everyone having a seat at the table. "Every voice is heard," said Sandy. Ivy reflected on this approach and felt that leadership is more effective through a communal approach and that group members are more responsive when "you're [all] on the same level."

Participants overwhelmingly displayed an emphasis on relationships when describing their leadership styles. It is clear

that participants made an intentional effort to build personal, sister-like relationships with members of their organizations in a way that disrupts hierarchical views of leadership. Mary talked about the importance and effectiveness of "communal leadership," making clear that every member "has a strength . . . that contributes to the process and the journey of the organization." Jane described that she "make[s] an effort to make every sister feel like she belongs here." Trust, affirmation, open communication, and inclusion were values that informed participants' leadership styles. Participants were purposeful in making sure others were included in decision-making and determining the goals and direction of the organizations. When discussing how she involves group members, Jana stated, "as a student leader you can't be biased or judgmental, you have to be open to different points of views and encourage everyone to speak what they feel and then other people can get perspectives." She valued different perspectives and knew they helped the organization move forward. Valerie also expressed the importance of including others through actively focusing on listening to them. She spoke about the importance of "hearing everyone's opinion and listening to them . . . actually listening to the words and not thinking about what you are going to say next but listening to what they are saying."

Some students expressed a desire to lead differently than previous leaders of their organizations, explicitly in a less-hierarchical way. Mary purposefully sought to use her role as co-chair of MEChA to shift the sense of leadership in the group. She described the previous leader of MEChA by saying, "he was very like 'I'm the president' very show off, giving MEChA a bad name." In talking about

how she shifted the way the organization was run she said, "we kind of fired the hierarchy." She further explained, "my goal . . . was that we were going to reestablish the communal sense of community, of the unified family . . . I really wanted the next co-chair to see that, as a co-chair, your goal or your personal mission is to be that sense of empowerment and to be someone who gives others power to do other things and to advocate for themselves and for the community".

As Mary's example clearly demonstrates, participants intentionally embraced a non-hierarchical and communal approach to leadership. They felt it was important for their organizations and members. By embracing a non-hierarchical and communal approach, some participants felt like they were not leaders because their approaches differed from authoritative and hierarchical leadership approaches. Jennifer said, "I don't really consider myself a student leader . . . I don't think I did something extraordinary, tremendous to be labeled a student leader, I feel like I just did my part in an organization that I love." Mary also troubled the term leader, stating "I struggle with that term leader . . . [as an] identity or title because I like to live my life humbly, so I like to live in a way that it's like 'don't praise me just talk to me, walk with me on this journey.'"

Influences on Leadership Approach. Two key themes emerged from the data describing the key influences shaping participants' leadership approaches: (a) family and culture, and (b) on-campus relationships.

Family and culture. The influence that family had on participants' approach to leadership was clearly represented in the data. Participants spoke about seeing their parents as role models and examples of dedication and hard work. For example,

Naomi spoke about her mother who graduated with her master's degree in social work with a 3.9 GPA while raising a child. Similarly, Mandy talked about her mother's experience as a "single mom with two kids going to nursing school and she put herself through school. . . . I saw how hard she worked and I feel like that has helped me." Participants also expressed having a strong and encouraging support system in their parents and families. Crystal said "I've always been told you can be anything and do anything. You know Mexican dads are always like that . . . 'you can be president, mija, or you can be a doctor.'" Although participants described the support and encouragement helpful, participants also talked about the pressure attached to their parents' encouragement. Crystal continued her story about her dad, adding "but what's mixed about that [encouragement] is that they expect a lot. If you're going to be a leader, you need to be the top leader . . . you want to be a doctor, not a nurse." Despite the pressure, Natalie was motivated by her parents' consistent encouragement throughout her childhood. "Since I was little my parents said 'you are going to be smart, you are going to be bright, you are going to do it' so I just—I wanted to do it so I did it."

In addition to the direct influence of and encouragement from family members, participants described the ways they intended to give back to their families through leadership. For example, Natalie described the importance of being a role model for her two young sisters. She thought about her own growth from going to college and pursuing leadership opportunities and how these experiences would positively impact her family back home. Similarly, Laney described her parents allowing her to move away for college as beneficial. Moreover, she explained that her parents were able to do this because "there was the understanding that I'm leaving, not because I'm going to go do something bad or something ridiculous, but because I'm going to go study, and I'm going to go do something for all of us, not just for myself."

The ways family positively influenced participants' approaches to leadership were, in many ways, connected to cultural influences on leadership. Vi explained, "I think a Latino in a leadership position does bring in their family values into it. Not only their family values, but their moral values – they lead a little bit more with their heart than they do with their brain, I guess you can say." In Vi's statement, it is clear that the values inherited through her family and culture greatly influence her approach to leadership. In fact, she extended this influence to the Latinx population more broadly. In addition to the influence of culture on participants' leadership approaches, culture was also at the forefront of their overarching leadership goals. Describing her interest in getting involved in on-campus leadership, Mary said, "I always wanted to be involved and needed to be fulfilled within the Latina community." Similarly, Julie described that, for her, being a leader was directly related to "helping my culture." The importance of engaging in a leadership role on campus was more than an individual opportunity. Rather, participants' leadership approaches were informed by family and culture. More specifically, being a leader was a product of and for their families and cultures.

On-campus relationships. Finally, participants' relationships with members of their campus community were mentioned as great sources of influence.

These relationships with faculty members, staff, and peers were meaningful sources of affirmation, encouragement, and empowerment. Mary talked specifically about faculty members in the sociology and women's studies departments as particularly influential in her decision to take on a leadership role in her organization. Other participants described weighing the insight of faculty members in making decisions to take on leadership roles. Moreover, some faculty members were directly involved in participants' processes of applying for leadership opportunities. For example, Trisha explained, "I feel like a lot of things I've been involved in have been directly because of a faculty person, saying 'oh you should do this . . . here let me help you.'"

Other professionals on campus were also influential in participants' approaches to leadership. For example, Mary described finding support from her financial aid counselor. This is an important finding, because we often think of student affairs professionals being the largest sources of support for students related to leadership. However, Mary's story shows us that support also comes from other areas of the institution. In addition to staff members, peer support was cited as important. For example, Jennifer described her process of deciding to run for president of her student organization:

"At the time, I don't think I was interested but a lot of my peers, a lot of the members of the group, thought I was a good fit for it so I took it on to see, you know, I think I wasn't confident in myself. Having the support of my group, saying 'you can do it, we know you can.' I think that's what pushed me more to take that position".

Peer support was critical for participants. The encouragement from their peers was often the final push needed to pursue a leadership role. Crystal explained being encouraged by the members of her organization was inspiring, "I was like okay, you believe I can do this . . . I can do this." Naomi echoed this sentiment, noting that although she may have pursued leadership opportunities without peer encouragement, "it definitely helps that people say you can [do it]."

Discussion

There is a dearth of literature on leadership and the Latina student population. However, there is a firm call to action in the leadership education scholarship to better understand student identities and their relationship to leadership. In this study we sought to answer the call to action and further understand the ways Latina student leaders make meaning of their leadership practices. It was important that we approached this study through an asset-based lens, acknowledging the unique strengths and perspectives that Latina students bring to leadership. We did this in ways that aligned with critical race theory, privileging storytelling and experiential knowledge as valid and important sources of data. We also looked to CCW as a useful theoretical framework to make meaning of our findings.

The study's findings help us understand Latina student leaders' approach to leadership through participants' words, lifting up critical voices that too often are not heard (Dugan, 2017). The findings also illuminate the women's knowledge, abilities, skills, and relationships that influenced their leadership experiences and approaches. As participants described what it means to be a leader, they focused on the importance of community and the members of an organization, seeing their role as leaders as serving and empowering others, benefiting the organization, and making a positive impact. As they described what it meant to them to be leaders, participants did not focus on their role or position and instead emphasized their responsibility to

to others, the organization, the larger community, and the Latinx community.

These findings reflect previous research on college women that suggests college women seek to empower others and enhance their organizations (Haber, 2011; Haber-Curran, 2013; Romano, 1996), and the findings in the current study on feelings of responsibility to others and the larger community appear to be more pronounced than in previous studies. Further, some participants who held leadership roles in culturally-based organizations acknowledged both representing the Latinx community and feeling responsibility for serving the larger Latinx community, reflecting the connection of identity to one's understanding of self as a leader (Guardia, 2015; Lozano, 2015b; Nuñez, 2004). The participants' desire to positively contribute to and serve others and the larger community reflects aspirational capital, whereby the participants were motivated to engage in meaningful and important work (Yosso, 2005). They saw the impact of their leadership beyond their organizations and aspired to make a greater impact.

Although some participants shied away from or downplayed the role of leader, there was a not a strong resistance to the label of leader, which was present in the study by Arminio et al. (2000) on the leadership experiences of students of color. Rather, participants' understanding of their roles reflected the more experienced Latina student leaders in Oranato and Musoba's (2015) study on Latina student leaders' leadership identity development at HSIs, whereby participants recognized their roles, and in many cases embraced their roles, seeing them as an opportunity to serve and empower others. Participants leveraged their knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to not only be selected or elected for their positions, but also to embrace their roles and lead their peers and organizations, pointing to participants' navigational capital (Yosso, 2005).

Participants in the study emphasized non-hierarchical and relational approaches to leadership. Many participants stressed the importance of collaborating with others, building relationships with group members, and making sure group members were included and that their voices were heard. These findings reflect the consistent themes of democratic and relational approaches to leadership in previous research on college women (Haber, 2011; Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2015; Romano, 1996) and more specifically on Latina student leaders (Oronato & Musoba, 2015). This also demonstrates an understanding of and enactment of social capital (Yosso, 2005). The importance of strong peer networks was critical to participants' success as organizational leaders. Further, participants built social capital through other on-campus relationships outside of their organizations, including with faculty and staff. These relationships were key influences in their leadership journeys. The focus on social capital and relational approaches to leadership aligns with frameworks on how one develops a leadership identity, particularly the value of relationships, as opposed to the position of leader, placed on how one understands and approaches leadership (Day, 2001; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005).

The findings of this study also illuminate the influence of family on participants' educational and leadership pursuits. This affirms previous research that found family members to be significant sources of encouragement in other areas of the Latinx college student experience (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2015; Luna & Martinez, 2013; Pérez, 2017; Sapp, Kiyama, & Dache-Gerbino, 2016). Participants leveraged the strength of their familial capital (Yosso, 2005) in ways that extended past their college enrollment and into their student leadership experiences. There were also meaningful indications of participants taking seriously their role in their family members' familial capital, acknowledging that they are role models and supporters for younger siblings and other family members. Additionally, signals of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) interlaced participants' stories about family. Aspirational capital nurtures dreams for the future despite systemic and structural barriers (Yosso, 2005). It was evident that encouragement from family members helped cultivate collegiate and

professional aspirations. This individual aspirational capital worked to generate collective aspirational capital for the organization, maintaining a sense of responsibility and "culture of possibility" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). capital for the organization, maintaining a sense of responsibility and "culture of possibility" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78).

Implications for Practice. Based on the findings of this study, we suggest key implications for practice. First, given the ways participants centered the importance of community in their conceptualizations of leadership, leadership educators and student affairs practitioners should consider reimagining traditional leadership opportunities. Although leadership may be intellectually understood as a process accessible to anyone, the practice and study of leadership often emphasize positional leadership and privilege hierarchical decision-making. What might a restructuring of common leadership opportunities on campus look like? How might relational and non-hierarchical practices be incorporated into the infrastructure of leadership opportunities? In addition to the practice of leadership, we should also reimagine the ways that leadership is taught on college campuses. How can leadership workshops or other leadership training spaces engage in relational and non-hierarchical practices? When done in community, engaging with difficult questions and dreaming up answers, we can reshape college student leadership in ways that reflect Latinx students' understanding of leadership.

The findings from the study suggest the salience of the role of family and culture in participants' approaches to leadership and the relevance of CCW as a framework for understanding participants' experiences. Asset-based approaches to understanding the role of identity and culture align with many of the values inherent in contemporary leadership education. There is an opportunity to expand the theoretical frameworks grounding and informing leadership education to include CCW in order to help respond to the need in leadership education to more critically examine approaches to leadership and center students' diverse identities and experiences (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016; Dugan, 2017; Guthrie & Chunoo, 2018; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2017).

Areas for Future Research. This study also has implications for future research within college student leadership development. First, this study demonstrates the sustained utility of CCW as a framework to investigate collegiate experiences and extends its use in the leadership context. Moreover, it appropriately examines the experiences of marginalized student populations in ways that center their social identities, including race, ethnicity, and gender. We encourage continued research using CCW as a theoretical framework within the student leadership scholarship and related scholarship including student involvement, fraternity and sorority life, and housing and residential life.

Additionally, we hope to see a continued commitment to disrupt the story most often told in leadership education by making space for the counternarratives of students on the margins. This includes relying on critical frameworks that privilege the voices and narratives of students, particularly students of color. Although this study deployed a phenomenological approach, we believe that narrative approaches or other methods that privilege storytelling could be useful for capturing the experiences of student leaders that are too often absent in the literature. We also believe these inquiries are best when they acknowledge the intersections of student identities. In this study, we found meaningful relevance in the intersections of participants' gender and racial identities.

Conclusion

This study adds to the very limited research on Latina students' leadership experiences. The findings reflected tenets of CCW including aspirational, familial, navigational, and social capital. A salience of community was present in participants' understanding of their roles as leaders, as was a sense of responsibility to others, the organization, and the larger community.

Additionally, participants emphasized relational and non-hierarchical approaches to leadership and highlighted the influence of their family and culture as well as relationships with members of their campus community in their leadership development.

Responding to the call by and for leadership scholars to center students' various and interlocking identities as a way to elevate voices of marginalized and minoritized populations and challenge dominant and limited perspectives on leadership (Bertrand Jones et al., 2016; Dugan 2017; Guthrie & Chunoo, 2019; Tillapaugh & Haber-Curran, 2017), we sought to center the voices of Latina student leaders in this study. We aim for this study to be a part of a growing body of scholarship that recognizes the cultural wealth of Students of Color and the ways that wealth informs and enhances their experiences and identities as student leaders.

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